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Dissensus in collaborative learning :

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Dissensus in Collaborative Learning:

Issues of Ideology and Authority

by

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Thesis Abstract

Dissensus in Collaborative Learning: Issues of Ideology and Authority

by Susan Haytmanek

Collaborative learning is defined in Chapter One of this thesis as a teaching approach based on the theory that knowledge is socially constructed. In a collaborative classroom, the teacher designs tasks for groups of students to discuss, and in the ensuing conversation, learning occurs.

Chapter Two traces the history of collaborative learning in the United States. Collaborative learning dates back to John Dewey's call for a more progressive approach to education, condemning the traditional teacher-centered classroom in which the student is the docile receptor of pre-ordained knowledge. Mara Holt describes early collaborative attempts in education in the United States, and roots of modern collabortive learning are traced both to Great Britain and to the educational needs in America manifested in the sixties and the seventies.

Exploring theoretical bases for collaborative learning, Chapter Three focuses on the theoretical framework for collaborative pedagogy as described by Kenneth Bruffee--Lev Vygotsky, Thomas Kuhn, Richard Rorty, Clifford Geertz,

Mikhail Bakhtin, and Stanley Fish. The relevance of the work of Vygotsky, Kuhn and Rorty is examined.

Within the final chapter, collaborative learning in English studies is critiqued, demonstrating dissensus in theory and pedagogy, which raises issues of ideology and authority. The critique concludes that the concept of collaborative learning, despite its initial emphasis on consensus, must allow for discrepancies. Dissensus is a natural product of the process of collaborative learning, since each approach to collaborative learning reflects not only the ideology of the learning community in which the collaborative approach is followed, but also the stance of that community with respect to authority.

INTRODUCTION

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At the Wright Brothers National Memorial, in Kittyhawk, North Carolina, the National Park Service offers many informative lectures about Orville and Wilbur Wright and their history-making flight on December 17, 1903. During "Flight Room Talk," the Park Guard begins by saying, "Although there was just one man on the first airplane as it took off, there were actually many people on board." [1] Following that introductory statement, the narrator proceeds to describe a lifetime of collaboration, not only between the two brothers, but also with highly educated family members, childhood friends, librarians across the nation, the National Weather Service, and other contemporary inventors. This collaboration shaped the principles of aeronautics adapted by the Wright brothers.

Although the phrase "collaborative learning" had not even been coined when the Wright brothers tinkered with bicycles, gliders and primitive aircraft in the nineteenth century, their reliance on collaboration evidences its natural occurrence in the educational history of America. Today, collaboration is becoming widely acknowledged in the

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[1] National Park Service, "Flight Room Talk," Wright Brothers National Memorial, Kittyhawk, North Carolina, July 17, 1990.

field of education, in particular in writing programs, often as an intentional departure from the more traditional concept of learning.

Students themselves recognize the need for change in the process by which they are educated. As Doug, a college freshman in my spring 1990 composition class, lamented: "To some students, the learning process of high school is similar to being brainwashed because in high school the students are forced to accept the teacher's interpretation and not have the ability to have their own thoughts." To me, it is critical that my students "have their own thoughts." Collaborative learning provides a theoretical framework and a pedagogical approach which maximizes each student's involvement in her own learning. James Berlin has said of the profession in which I find myself,

> In teaching writing, we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill that is meant as a simple complement to the more important studies of other areas. We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it.[2]

Collaborative learning offers a way for my students to experience the world, and, through conversation in a community, to order and make sense of it.

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[2] James Berlin, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook, ed., Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett (New York): Oxford UP, 1988) 58.

Within this paper I provide an overview of collaborative learning: definition; history; theoretical tenets; and my critique of the current status of this philosophy and pedagogy, highlighting the lack of consensus, not only among the leading scholars in the field, but among the many teachers implementing this social means of making knowledge in their classroom--Dissensus in Collaborative Learning: Issues of Ideology and Authority.

CHAPTER ONE

Definition of Collaborative Learning

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Definition of Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning has been defined by Kenneth Bruffee as "a form of indirect teaching in which the teacher sets the problem and organizes the students to work it out collaboratively."[3] This reorganization of traditional educational theory and practice, which is based on the concept of the social construction of knowledge, focuses on **student** conversation in small groups instead of **teacher-centered** lecturing. John Trimbur further describes these shifts away from the traditional paradigm of knowledge formation and the roles of the teacher and students in collaborative learning:

> According to the traditional conventions that regulate the social life of the classroom, education operates on a hierarchical model. Authority is centralized in the figure of the teacher, and knowledge is passed from the top down. In the traditional teacher-centered classroom, the students are atomized; they are an aggregate of individuals organized to learn from and perform for the teacher as individuals. In contrast to this model, collaborative learning attempts to decentralize the authority traditionally held by the teacher and to shift the locus of

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[3] Kenneth A. Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" College English 46 (1984): 637.

> knowledge from the sovereign domain of the teacher to the social interaction of the learners.[4]

As a result of this reorganization, "collaborative learning has as its main feature a structure that allows for talk: students are supposed to talk with each other as they work together on various classroom projects and activities and it is in this talking that much of the learning occurs."[5] The role of the teacher is shifted to that of a planner who provides the impetus and the setting with assigned tasks. The function of the teacher changes "from 'information giver' to 'guide on the side,' one who is available to respond to the students' emerging insights."[6] The pedagogical shift, then, reflects more than an innovation in classroom management; it is a shift in theory of how students learn.

In addition to a difference in organization and approach to learning, collaborative learning, Kenneth Bruffee suggests, also produces different results. At the Conference on Collaborative Learning in June 1990, Bruffee

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[4]John Trimbur, "Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing," Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition, ed. Ben W. McClelland and Timothy R. Donovan (New York: MLA) 80.

[5] Jeff Golub, introduction, Focus on Collaborative Learning, ed. Jeff Golub (Urbana: NCTE, 1988) 1.

[6] Golub 2.

described learning as the process of constructing and reconstructing knowledge situated in a **particular** history. Bruffee probed the nature of knowledge: "There is no right answer that is eternal truth."[7] Instead, all knowledge is a social construct, dependent upon the situation in which it is shaped. Learning, then, is the reconstruction of socially defined beliefs using language, which is itself a collaborative entity.

This description of the peer conversation essential to collaboration means that collaborative learning cannot be viewed as synonymous with group work. **More** than group work, the essence of collaborative learning is the verbal exchange and construction of ideas. Trimbur explains this difference:

> ...collaborative learning may be distinguished from other forms of group work on the grounds that it organizes students not just to work together on common projects but more important [sic] to engage in a process of intellectual negotiation and collective decision making. The aim of collaborative learning, its advocates hold, is to reach a consensus through an expanding conversation. This conversation takes place at a number of levels--first in small discussion groups, next among the groups in a class, then between the class and the teacher, and finally among the class, the teacher, and the wider

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[7] Kenneth A. Bruffee, address, Bard Conference on Collaborative Learning, New York, 29 June 1990.

community of knowledge.[8]

Weiner summarizes the difference between group work and collaborative learning, "Students put into groups are only students grouped and are not collaborators, unless a task that demands consensual learning unifies the group activity."[9]

In summary, collaborative learning is a teaching approach based on the theory that knowledge is socially constructed, in which the teacher designs tasks for groups of students to discuss, and, in the ensuing conversation, learning occurs.

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[8] John Trimbur, "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," College English 51 (1989): 602.

[9] Harvey S. Weiner, "Collaborative Learning in the Classroom: A Guide to Evaluation," College English 48 (1986): 54.

CHAPTER TWO

History:

Collaborative Learning

in the United States

CHAPTER TWO

History: Collaborative Learning in the United States

Throughout the twentieth century, educational pedagogy in the United States has turned to collaborative and cooperative practices. Beginning with John Dewey and his call for a more progressive approach to education, the traditional philosophy of education was questioned. Dewey described the underlying ideas of the traditional mode of education as follows:

> The subject-matter of education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation....The attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience....Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced.[10]

Dewey then proceeded to question this educational tradition as well as the basic nature of knowledge, the way in which learning occurs, the role of teacher and the role of learner. Such probing into the underpinnings of the traditional educational system stimulated experimentation.

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[10] John Dewey, Experience and Education, (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1963) 17-18.

Once educators dared to question the Aristotelian assumption that knowledge and truth exist *a priori*, the concepts of learning and teaching could be explored and better defined. While Dewey defined the old traditional scheme of education as "one of imposition from above and from outside," he described his progressive scheme as one in which learning occurs through experience.[11] He cautioned that there is a need to search for a more effective source of authority than the traditional teacher-centered classroom.[12] Furthermore, he modified the concept of teacher from a transmitter of pre-ordained information to that of a guide:

> It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading. There is no point in his being more mature if, instead of using his greater insight to help organize the conditions of the experience of the immature, he throws away his insight.[13]

With these ideas, Dewey set the stage for collaborative learning. He questioned the concept of pre-ordained knowledge, the role of teacher as deliverer of pre-packaged goods, and the student as docile receptor. Instead, he offerred to educators a vision of experience-based, interactive learning, with the teacher organizing the

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[11] Dewey 18.

[12] Dewey 21.

[13] Dewey 38.

conditions of the experience. Most importantly (for those interested in collaborative learning), Dewey acknowledged the social construction of knowledge: "...Experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience."[14] As a result of Dewey's questions and progressive ideas, American education responded with new paradigms.

Collaborative and cooperative learning experiences, among other innovations, followed Dewey's call for reform within the world of education. Mara Holt summarized the cooperative and collaborative trends stemming from Dewey's advocacy of a more progressive educational theory from 1911 until 1986.[15] Holt presented collaborative pedagogies as consistently reflective of the social, intellectual and economic trends of each era. During the 1920's, the project method briefly flourished. Within this approach, groups of students worked on projects with the teacher invisible, but the students became lost in the groups and this method died out.

"Almost everything turns collaborative in the

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[14] Dewey 40.

[15] Mara Holt, "Chronic Innovation: The History of Collaborative Learning," Bard College on Collaborative Learning, 1 July 1990.

thirties" as the social approach reflects economic unity.[16] Collaborative practices included group-written poems, peer editing, and the teacher as a member of a group. Theoretical concerns of the thirties included determination both that knowledge is socially centered with authority resting with the individual, and that individuality is the product of social experience.

According to Holt, during the 1940's and 1950's, the trend away from collaboration reflected the political climate. Fascism and Nazism made collective movements unpopular. This educational distancing from cooperative movements continued during the 1950's and the Cold War.

Holt concluded that the current movement toward collaborative learning is not a recent innovation, but rather, it has a "long and unself-conscious history in English studies in America."[17] Holt predicted that collaborative learning will continue to change in response to society.

The current concept and practice of collaborative learning is historically linked both to roots in Britain and to specific educational needs in America manifested in the sixties and seventies. In Great Britain in 1964, Minnie L.

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[16] Holt.

[17] Holt.

J. Abercrombie published research regarding the education of medical students: "Abercrombie was convinced that small group discussion provided the most effective way to help those students become more sophisticated and accurate at diagnosis and, hence, better physicians."[18] Over a ten year period, she observed and compared the training of medical students in two separate scenarios. In the first, the staff physician, followed by his trail of medical students, asked an individual student to suggest a diagnosis, whereas in the second, the students were allowed to form groups in which to share knowledge and form a consensus about the diagnosis. According to Abercrombie, the collaboration allowed in the second scenario enabled the students to learn clinical judgment more quickly.[19] During this same time period in England, Edwin Mason turned to collaborative learning in British secondary education as a way of democratizing education, of reducing what were regarded as socially destructive authoritarian practices. Students learning in groups seemed to shift the classroom authority. In coining the term "collaborative learning," Mason commented on more than teaching and learning

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[18]Lisa Ede and Andrea Kunsford, Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP) 111.

[19] Kenneth A. Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" College English 46 (1984): 636.

practices--he defined knowledge as social in origin, constructed by this activity of collaborating.[20]

During this era of Abercrombie's observations and Mason's experimentation in Great Britain, within the United States the ferment of the 1960's and the problems encountered by college students in the 1970's also fostered alternate aproaches to education. By the late 1960's,

> teach-ins and study groups of the antiwar movement, the consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement, the communes of the counterculture--all reveal[ed] a deeply felt desire for community, self-organization, mutual aid, and nonauthoritarian styles of leadership and decision making.[21]

To answer the needs being expressed on campuses across the nation, educators responded with experimentation. Jerry Farber, in his "A Progress Report on Teaching" in which he evaluates changes in the past twenty years, reflects back on the seventies as a time "when many of us were trying to translate a radical critique of the education system into classroom practice."[22] He describes his own attempts:

> For a few years my own approach tended to be head-on and at full-speed: "Your authenticity or your life!" Long, long silences. Sermons. Zen weirdness.

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[20] Trimbur, "Collaborative" 93.

[21] Trimbur, "Collaborative 90.

[22] Jerry Farber, "Learning How to Teach: A Progress Report," College English 52 (1990): 135.

Classes held in people's living rooms. Dancing. Darkness.[23]

Educators of this period tried to respond with expanded concepts of theory and pedagogy. The resultant educational climate fostered interest in collaborative learning.

In addition to the social pressure of the counter culture in America during the 'sixties, by the nineteen-seventies the increase in non-traditional learners, large classrooms, and the decline of freshman entry-level skills further challenged teachers to find better of ways of engaging students in learning.[24] Collaborative learning provided that alternative, with its shift from the traditional paradigm of education, which, according to Weiner, regarded the mind as a mirror of nature and the teacher's goal as giving enough information to students so their mental mirrors reflect "reality."[25] In contrast to the mirror of nature philosophy, collaborative learning allowed students to construct their **own** reality through conversation. Further, collaborative learning could "connect learning and the social experience of students by organizing students in transitional communities, to bridge the gap between their indigenous communities and the

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[23] Farber 136.

[24] Weiner 52.

[25] Weiner 53.

community of college educated men and women."[26] As a result, since the 'seventies, collaborative learning has increasingly become an option of the educational system in America.

This brief history of cooperative efforts at learning demonstrates

> "that the drive toward individual autonomy, competitiveness, and isolated selfhood has always been countered, often only in a whisper but at other times in a louder, clearer voice, by a call for community, for shared public discourse, for working together for some common good."[27]

Beginning with Dewey in the United States and Mason in Great Britain, this century has witnessed significant reform in educational philosophy. Both the theory and practice of collaborative learning have arisen in response to this need for change, not only as initiated by the educational scholars but also as demonstrated by the social forces throughout the century.

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[26] Trimbur, "Collaborative" 91.

[27] Ede and Lunsford 112.

CHAPTER THREE

Theory:

In Support of Collaborative Learning

CHAPTER THREE

Psychological and Philosophical Theory: In Support of Collaborative Learning

Kenneth Bruffee explored alternative and innovative teaching methods in the late sixties and early seventies. His search led him to demonstrate the relevance of collaborative activities, such as demonstrations and support groups, in the "real world" to forming collaborative learning models for the "academic world." Once Bruffee had described fully the collaborative learning approach, he focussed his further scholarship on theory to substantiate his pedagogical stance. An outline of that scholarship follows.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

According to Bruffee, Lev Vygotsky, a child psychologist with a social constructionist persuasion,

> demonstrated experimentally the socio-linguistic process by which children learn to think analytically. His thesis is that we learn to use language instrumentally, "talking through" our tasks with another person and then internalizing that conversation as

thought.[28]

As Jerome Bruner further describes Vygotsky's theory, "It is the internalization of overt action that makes thought, and particularly the internalization of external dialogue that brings the powerful tool of language to bear on the stream of thought."[29] Bruffee interprets Vygotsky to mean that "reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized."[30] Rather than seeing thought as a natural attribute of man, Bruffee, like Vygotsky, sees thought as "an artifact created by social interaction;" that is, "we can think because we can talk, and we think in ways we have learned to talk."[31] Vygotsky explains the interactive process of verbal thinking:

> The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process the relation of thought to word undergoes changes which themselves may be regarded as development in the functional sense. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect something with

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[28] Kenneth A. Bruffee, "Social Construction, Language, and Knowledge," College English 48 (1986): 784.

[29] Jerome Bruner, "Introduction," Thought and Language, Lev Vygotsky (New York, John Wiley & Sons) vi-vii.

[30] Bruffee, "Conversation" 639.

[31] Bruffee, "Conversation" 640.

> something else, to establish a relationship between things. Every thought moves, grows and develops, fulfills a function, solves a problem.[32]

Thus, Vygotsky portrays thinking as an interactive relationship between words and thought, with thoughts changing as connections and relations change.

This interpretation of the development of thought provides a solid foundation for an approach to learning which focuses on the social construction of knowledge; it suggests that teachers should create opportunitites for students to talk things out and create their own thought through this talking. Bruffee directly relates the "range, complexity, and subtlety of our thought, its power, the practical and conceptual uses we can put it to, and the very issues we can address" to the degree to which we have learned to participate in public and social conversation.[33] The corollary to this assumption about thought--and its message to teachers of rhetoric--is that in order to think well, individuals must learn to converse well in learning communities. The objective of collaborative learning is the establishment of such communities.

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[32] Lev Vygotsky, Thought and Language, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1962) 125.

[33] Bruffee, "Conversation" 640.

When University of California professor of the history of science, Thomas Kuhn, published The Structure of Scientific Revolutions in 1970, he redefined the nature of scientific knowledge. His examination of the way scientific knowledge is generated, established, maintained or challenged has offered an additional rationale for the collaborative formation of knowledge. His concepts of "paradigm shift" and the "social construction of scientific knowledge" give a basis for collaborative learning, a nonfoundational social constructionist concept of knowledge that has since proliferated throughout the academic disciplines. Kuhn begins by questioning the development of science as the the "accumulation of individual discoveries and inventions."[34] He continues to say that observation and experience alone cannot determine a body of knowledge, because each observation or experience "is always a formative ingredient of the beliefs espoused by a given scientific community at a given time."[35] Further examining the history of science, Kuhn discusses examples of

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[34] Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1970) 2.

[35] Kuhn 4.

scientific revolutions:

> Each of them necessitated the community's rejection of one time-honored scientific theory in favor of another incompatible with it. Each produced a consequent shift in the problems available for scientific scrutiny and in the standards by which the profession determined what should count as an admissable problem or as a legitimate problem-solution. And each transformed the scientific imagination in ways that we shall ultimately need to describe as a transformation of the world within which scientific work was done.[36]

And, so, according to Kuhn, a paradigm shift occurs in a revolutionary way when a significant number of scholars in a discipline questions the commonly held body of beliefs and assumptions and devises a new model: "This replacement of one conceptual model by another one is Kuhn's paradigm shift."[37] This view of knowledge formation as established, maintained, and challenged by "communities of knowledgeable peers" confirms collaborative learning.[38] Bruffee regards as most significant for collaborative learning Kuhn's understanding of scientific knowledge as common property--a social construct.

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[36] Kuhn 6.

[37] Maxine Hairston, "Winds of Change," College Composition and Communication 33 (1982): 77.

[38] Bruffee, "Conversation" 646.

Richard Rorty, in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, has generalized Kuhn. "Whereas Kuhn says that scientific knowledge is a social construct, Rorty says that all knowledge is a social construct."[39] Rorty takes Kuhn's concept of "normal science" out of the discipline of science; he coins the term "normal discourse" to indicate conversation within a community of knowledgeable peers within **any** discipline. To define this community is to determine a "group of people who accept, and whose work is guided by, the same paradigms and the same code of values and assumptions."[40] This theoretical model of Rorty, based on Kuhn's concept of scientific knowledge, is a basis for the collaborative learning groups, in which student conversation determines values, paradigms and assumptions.

Rorty also looks **to** Dewey and **away** from foundationalism, as he calls seeking the "truth" self-deceptive; he sees the point of philosophy as "preventing man from deluding himself with the notion that he knows himself, or anything else, except under optional descriptions."[41] This post-foundational view confirms

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[39] Bruffee, "Social" 774.

[40] Bruffee, "Conversation" 642.

[41] Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 379.

collaborative learning, which also views knowledge as tentative, limited to a particular community within a particular moment in history.

Bruffee, then has used educational, psychological and philosophical research and theory to support his collaborative approach to teaching. The work of Lev Vygotsky supports the idea that thought develops through dialogue. Kuhn effectively destroys the traditional sense of truth and knowledge in the field of science, basing knowledge formation on the community of knowledgable peers. Rorty takes Kuhn's ideas outside of the realm of science and applies them to **all** disciplines, using Dewey's anti-foundationalism. In addition to Vygotsky, Kuhn, and Rorty, Bruffee also turns to the work of Clifford Geertz, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Stanley Fish, all of whom discuss the social nature of thought, language and text. As a result of this theoretical tour, the tenets of collaborative learning can be viewed within our own knowledge community as a sound approach to the teaching of rhetoric at this moment in time, the nineteen-nineties.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITIQUE

LACK OF CONSENSUS IN COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: ISSUES OF AUTHORITY AND IDEOLOGY IN THEORY AND PEDAGOGY

CHAPTER FOUR

Critique

Lack of Consensus in Collaborative Learning: Issues of Ideology and Authority in Theory and Pedagogy

Introduction to Critique

Collaborative learning, based upon the social construction of knowledge, is a movement within the field of English studies closely allied with the concept of "consensus." For a movement linked so closely to "consensus," "dissensus" is surprisingly manifest throughout collaborative learning theory and practice. Upon delving closely into the many aspects of dissensus in theory and in pedagogy, issues implicating both ideology and authority emerge. As a result of evaluating these conflicts, I conclude that the concept of collaborative learning, despite its initial emphasis on consensus, must allow for discrepancies--dissensus is a natural product of the process of collaborative learning. Since each approach to collaborative learning reflects not only the ideology of the learning community in which the collaborative approach is followed, but also the stance of that community with respect

to authority, the theory behind and pedagogy of collaborative learning will vary from knowledge-forming community to knowledge-forming community.

Dissensus: Determining Ideology

Collaborative learning pedagogy is becoming increasingly common in English studies. Because of this progressive interest in collaborative learning within rhetoric classrooms, the ideology of collaborative learning is questioned by scholars in rhetoric. James Berlin cautions us that no approach to rhetoric is innocent, that each approach reflects an ideology:

> It is true that some rhetorics have denied their imbrication in ideology...[but] A rhetoric can never be innocent, can never be a disinterested arbiter of the ideologic claims of others because it is always already serving ideological claims.[42]

Inquiry into the ideological claims of collaborative learning, however, provokes a variety of views; each of these depends upon the ideology of both rhetorician and the rhetorical situation, as well as the concommitant position of authority of that rhetorician. Rhetorician James Zebroski initially confuses the issue of the ideology of the practice of collaborative learning by questioning the

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[42] James Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," College English 50 (1988): 477.

ideological origins of collaborative learning. In turning to Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist writing from and for a different political, social and economic system, Zebroski finds that the advocates of collaborative learning in the United States set up a potential ideological contradiction:

> For about a decade, it has been fashionable in certain scholarly quarters to cite Vygotsky. With few exceptions...none of these scholars has mentioned, let alone dealt with the fact that Vygotsky was explicitly a socialist and was explicitly constructing a theory built on what he saw as socialist principles. Composition scholars who use Vygotsky often do not sense the slightest contradiction between the fact that they are using a socialist theory to try to understand composition and the fact that their goal is to better prepare students for their places in a capitalist society.[43]

In this statement, Zebroski implies that the authority of the political and socioeconomic system in which this psychological theory of learning **was conceived** will supercede the ideology of the classroom in which it **is used**.

To counter this claim of Zebroski, rhetoricians need simply to acknowledge their incorporation of the theoretical ballast of a socialist psychologist into their own respective ideologies. That is, there are socialist aspects of collaborative learning in addition to socialist origins--

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[43] James T. Zebrosky, "The Social Construction of Self in the Work of Lev Vygotsky," The Writing Instructor 8 (1989): 149.

respective ideologies. That is, there are socialist aspects of collaborative learning in addition to socialist origins--for example, validation of knowledge constructed in social groups rather than by isolated individuals. These aspects are modified by the people using them and turned to their own purposes; this assimilation of a socialist theory into the differing ideologies prevalent in writing classrooms is common in rhetoric. Consequently, different ideologies will use this socialist-in-origin theory of collaborative learning in **different** ways: the ideologies of the teacher, institution, classroom itself, and the students will all push collaborative learning in different directions, despite the socialist theoretical origins. Each rhetorician determines his own rationale for using collaborative learning and the additional ideological circumstances of the institution, student body and classroom further redefine this approach to learning. Therefore, the teacher of rhetoric is not an arbiter of the ideological claims of others (e.g., those of Vygotsky); his practice of collaborative learning, a concept of learning with socialist roots, does not demonstrate his acceptance of socialism. Instead, he simply uses collaborative learning within the framework of his **own** operative ideology. Rather than viewing collaborative learning as representative of only one particular ideology, as Zebroski does, rhetoricians must

see collaborative learning as a movement, socialist in origin, which is accepted by differing ideologies. Different ideologies using collaborative learning in different ways will result in dissensus about authority within the rhetoric classroom: such dissensus will be explored in the following pages.

Dissensus: Effects of Ideology and Cognitive Theory on Collaboration

Social construction of knowledge versus individual cognition: These two concepts of learning are diametrically opposed, and the consequences of these two concepts upon the ideology and authority of teaching and writing are vastly different. By adopting the concept of the social construction of knowledge, one attributes authority to the conversation resulting in knowledge; in contrast, by adopting the cognitive approach to learning, one acknowledges the authority of the individual in shaping his own learning. When cognitive theories are mixed, dissensus regarding the authority of knowledge formation affects collaborative learning practice, resulting in confusion.

With respect to the writing classroom and collaborative learning, Bruffee notes,

> The difference between saying that

> language has a social context and that language is a social construct defines a key difference between cognitive and social constructionist work in composition. Cognitive work is based on the assumption that writing is primarily an individual act. A writer's language originates within the inner reaches of the individual mind. We use language primarily to express ideas generated in the mind and to communicate them to other individual human minds in the "social context."
>
> In contrast, social constructionist work in composition is based on the assumption that writing is primarily a social act. A writer's language originates with the community to which he or she belongs. We use language primarily to join communities we do not yet belong to and to cement our membership in communities we already belong to.[44]

Despite these inherent theoretical oppositions and their subsequently opposing ideological assumptions of authority and collaboration, many teachers who ascribe the authority of learning to individual cognitive processes **do** use collaborative learning approaches in their classrooms. They ignore the discrepancy between their <u>theory</u> of learning, based upon individual cognition, and their <u>practice</u> of collaborative learning techniques, which reflect a social constructionist approach to knowledge. This contradiction of cognitive theory and pedagogy produces confusing results. Such volleying of the authority for making knowledge and

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[44] Bruffee, "Social" 784.

text back and forth from individual to group to individual is inconsistent and ineffective. When a teacher who believes that both learning and writing are private, individual acts subsequently proceeds to group her class for a collaborative writing assignment, the students will not understand this departure from the traditional way in which their class is normally conducted. They may demonstrate insecurity with the collaborative task.

Reither and Vipond pinpoint the reason such practices often fail. When teachers implement collaborative learning techniques in a traditional classroom, they are trying to use opposing rationales:

> The problem is that teachers who have tried to introduce forms of coauthoring, peer editing, or workshopping into their classrooms have most often not done so in the context of wholly reconceived and redesigned courses. As a result, they have been disappointed with the effectiveness of these approaches.[45]

Students in such a situation are confused about the purpose of collaborative interaction when it is not consistently presented as the basis for learning. In the context of a traditional teacher-centered rhetoric classroom, in which the professor lectures on the qualities of "good" writing and then distributes student writing for the purpose of

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[45] James Reither and Douglas Vipond, "Writing as Collaboration," College English 51 (1989): 855.

eliciting pre-ordained student criticisms, the freedom does not exist for successful collaboration. In such a classroom, peer evaluations only parrot what the students think the teacher would say. Additionally, student writers in such a setting do not value the criticism of their peers, caring only what the teacher thinks. Trying to use collaborative learning in such an authoritarian classroom makes students uncertain and their collaboration manifests their uncertainty. The students do not believe that <u>they</u> have the power to interact constructively with one another's texts. Because of this investiture of authority with the teacher rather than with the students-in-conversation, peer conferencing fails.

Bruffee also acknowledges the conceptual discrepancy when collaborative practices are superimposed on a traditionally designed program. To resolve the inconsistency, he recommends an ideological expansion of the teacher's conceptual framework, suggesting that traditionalists adopt the assumptions of collaborative learning:

> Some teachers using collaborative learning who have adopted social constructionist assumptions have found that they understand better what they are trying to do and, understanding it better, have a better chance of doing it

well.[46]

Despite Bruffee's hopeful statement, misguided application of collaborative practices among teachers who regard learning and writing as individual acts, however, is prevalent within the pedagogy of rhetorical classrooms. For example, in the NCTE publication, Focus on Collaborative Learning, the descriptions of classroom practices are just that--collaborative learning techniques and activities, with no recommendation to the teacher/reader that he should either question or rethink the rationale behind such practices. Thus, the conflict is perpetuated: the "die-hard" social constructionist teachers exclusively use collaborative methods in their classrooms, acknowledging the authority of the collaborative groups; the cognitive or "undeclared" use "whatever works," ignoring the question of authority for knowledge, often confusing students with their isolated attempts to bring collaboration into a classroom in which authority "officially" resides in the teacher and the indvidual student.

A description of the eclectic approach found in Focus on Collaborative Learning--with no declaration of learning theory or subsequent assumption of authority--is the following:

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[46] Bruffee, "Social" 787.

> ...although collaborative learning is a very effective means of instruction, I must use it sparingly, alternating it with whole-class activities, the buddy system, and individual activities .....Although some educational gurus try to sell the way in their books and lectures, experienced teachers know that a mix, a variety of practices is a sounder policy....Some activities lend themselves well to collaborative learning; others call for individual or whole class approach. Moreover, some people work best in groups; others prefer to go it alone.[47]

Such thinking is commonplace in the field of composition, and represents teachers eager to use "whatever works" with their students, with no concern with ideology and assumptions of the authority for learning within the classroom or within the emerging text in a writing class. This excerpt further evidences the dissensus among teacher-advocates of collaborative learning: in the "trenches," the teachers who are not involved with research and scholarship are unaware of how much their own ideology affects their teaching practice. Without adapting a consistent rationale for the way they teach, these teachers may encounter the disappointment described earlier by Reither, Vipond and Bruffee.

A literature class which is conducted according to the

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[47] Whitworth, "Collaborative Learning and Other Disasters," Focus on Collaborative Learning (Illinois: NCTE, 1988) 19.

traditional "banking notion" of education, as described by Freire,[48] in which teachers represent the authority for knowledge, depositing information in otherwise "empty" students, is not conducive to collaborative learning approaches. In such a situation, grouping students collaboratively for discussion related to an assigned text will result once again in the students' agreeing on an answer that they think the teacher wants. Because they know the authority in that classroom really resides with the teacher, these students will not feel free to negotiate and interact collaboratively. Therefore, without the prerequisite changes in classroom ideology and authority--changes essential to the real success of collaborative learning practices--the effectiveness of collaborative learning is limited. Consequently, the bifurcation within the field of rhetoric with respect to the concept of how students learn and, subsequently, where the authority of knowledge lies perpetuates dissension in collaborative learning--this dissensus is another manifestation of ideological differences. Collaborative learning is imbedded in a variety of ideological bases, and its effectiveness depends upon the ideology of the cognitive theory and the

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[48] Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (New York: Continuum,1989) .

subsequent site of authority in which it is presented.

Dissensus: The Relationship of Collaboration and the Role of Language

Not only is the effectiveness of collaboration dependent upon the prevalent ideology and authority for knowledge within the classroom, but also upon the authority invested in the collaboration resulting in text. During writing, the role of collaboration shifts as the role of language shifts; therefore, the dissensus regarding the role of collaboration within language formation needs to be examined. Ede and Lunsford, in Singular Texts/Plural Authors, initiate this examination when they disprove "the pervasive commonsense assumption that writing is inherently and necessarily a solitary, individual act" and thereby document the prevalence of collaborative writing in the workplace.[49] In their collaboratively written book, they show the efficacy of group writing in professional fields; yet, they acknowledge the conflict between the two different purposes for writing--pragmatic writing (product-oriented)

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[49] Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, Singular Texts/Plural Authors (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990) 5.

in the workplace versus epistemic writing (process-oriented) in the field of English studies. Ede and Lunsford share their observations about this conflict,

> Collaborative writers aiming pragmatically at efficiency do not have the occasion to consider the way language constructs varying economic or political agendas, which are in turn ideologically freighted. And yet this highly pragmatic view of language, to our surprise, coincided in almost every case with a marked appreciation, and at times even reverence, for language and its power. The potential contradiction between these two views of language represented for us an illuminating, though complex and largely hidden, site of struggle. In Bakhtinian terms, these interviews contain multiple and competing "voices of language," the heteroglossic nature of which seemed not to concern our interviewees. (It perhaps goes without saying that the highly pragmatic view of language held by those we interviewed is also at odds with the view widely held in our profession--of writing as a means of discovery, of getting in touch with the self, of coming to know rather than to report).[50]

Ede and Lunsford here acknowledge two different kinds of writing and language that are "at odds," and two differing postures of authority within the written language.

Within the first kind of writing, that which is "highly pragmatic," Ede and Lunsford prove that collaboration works

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[50] Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990) 43-44.

well when a specific pragmatic end **dictates** the purpose and audience and when the **demands** for efficiency within the workplace **determine** the resultant text. In this kind of setting, the authority clearly resides within the **demands of the situation** and, subsequently, the role of writing and collaboration are both restricted--and yet, interestingly, the collaboration in this pragmatic writing is viewed as successful by Ede and Lunsford.

Trimbur questions the efficacy of a collaborative effort in which the role of language is pragmatically limited, as described in Ede and Lunsford's study, when he interrogates an additional claim by Bruffee that consensus is the norm in business:

> In this regard, ...Bruffee...seriously underestimates the extent to which the conversations of these discourse communities are regulated not so much by consensual negotiation and shared decison-making as by what Jurgen Habermas calls a 'success orientation' of instrumental control and rational efficiency.[51]

Here, Trimbur states that collaboration as consensual negotiation is inhibited by the authoritative and delimiting demands of the competing and contradictory workplace situations. Rather than negotiating with language, these collaborators negotiate with their pragmatic obligations to

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[51] John Trimbur, "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," College English 51 (1989): 610.

succeed. The authority for this kind of writing is clearly dictated by the task--the pragmatic demands of the writing situation--rather than the collaborative group of writers. This statement by Trimbur modifies the conclusion of Ede and Lunsford; whereas Trimbur agrees with Ede and Lunsford that a collaborative effort takes place in business negotiations, he contends that the success does not result from consensual negotiations, but, instead, from the restricting demands of the situation. The authority associated with workplace writing and the collaboration of workplace writing is much like the authority and resulting collaboration in a structured, formalist, teacher-centered classroom; in both, the desired knowledge or end-product (text) seem to be predetermined, superimposed on the writing and collaboration by an outside authority, either the teacher or the specifics of the writing situation.

The second kind of writing referred to by Ede and Lunsford occurs in the academic world, where rhetoric is a means of discovery, of making knowledge. In this kind of expressive or epistemic writing, the power resides in the language, in the process of learning through using language and not in the product. In contrast to the pragmatic kind of writing described in their book, the role of language in writing to discover is **not** limited. Authority here rests in the process of writing, in the negotiation of language, with

less specific practical demands being made. In contrast to the structured collaboration in workplace writing, the ideology of writing to discover grants freedom to the community of writers to negotiate interactively with language. Ede and Lunsford do not include this type of writing in their study about plural authors creating single texts.

A question is raised by their exclusion of "writing as a means of discovery, of getting in touch with the self" in a work about collaborative writing. **Can** writers collaborate while writing to discover? The relation of collaboration and language is being explored by rhetoricians in the classroom. Tilly Warnock emphasizes a focal point in language negotiation, a point at which both the role of language and the role of collaboration in writing shift, when she advises writers in her text, Writing Is Critical Action, "One of the most important decisions you will learn to make is when to write to discover and when to revise for specific situations."[52] Her advice highlights the point in which a shift in authority within language negotiation occurs: authority initially resides in the discovery process, the individual's conversation with himself (and the community in which he writes expressively) **until** it shifts--

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[52] Tilly Warnock, Writing Is Critical Action (Glenview, Illinois, Scott, Foresman and Co.: 1989) 9.

with revision for a specific situation--to the new community with a defined purpose and audience. That is, authority rests completely in the language negotiation of the writer and his community of peers during writing to discover; however, with the superimposition of the demands of a specific situation, the authority for the writing changes, moving to those outside demands, and the new community those demands represent. When writing to discover ends, and revision for a specific situation begins, authority for the text passes from the writing process to the strictures guiding that revision. Throughout both of these phases of writing--writing to discover and writing to revise for a specific situation--writing remains a collaborative entity and the authority rests in the community where the discourse resides. That community, however, shifts as the role of language shifts. Initially, a writer writes in a more personal community; he then revises for a more specific situation, and with this revising, the role of collaboration changes. Ede and Lunsford documented collaboration once the shift in discourse community had occurred. Teachers with collaborative writing classes can document the collaboration necessary and prevalent at all stages of "writing as a means of discovery."

Within the rhetoric classroom, both types of writing referred to by Ede and Lunsford and further described by

Warnock, with their respective and contradictory sites of authority and ideology, are prevalent. The purpose of each is different as is the concommitant and inherent position of authority. Consequently, the teacher of rhetoric must be aware of the potential contradictions of authority as the roles of language and collaboration shift in the different writing situations the students encounter. In "discovery" writing, the authority for making knowledge resides in the collaborative interaction resulting in text, but in "practical/situational" writing, to fulfill a specific purpose, the authority resides within the demands of the situation, with collaboration to achieve that pragmatic end.

Not only does the role of language, and its authority, affect the collaboration, but the ideology within the classroom also affects the role of language. A formalist, teacher-centered classroom can recreate an artificial workplace ideology, where the situational demands dictate the writing and collaboration. Similarly, the ideology of an interactive, student and language centered classroom will foster writing to discover. The kinds of writing and collaboration supported by each ideologically designed role demonstrate the differences. Essentially, then, these two views of the role of language can be found not only as Ede and Lunsford indicated--the pragmatic within the workplace, and writing to discover within the profession of rhetoric--

but, actually, the ideology of the rhetoric classroom ultimately determines the role of language and collaboration within that class. In an interactive ideology, the shifts in the role of writing and the purpose for collaboration occur at the point Warnock notes (when moving from discovery writing to situational writing); however, in the formalistically structured classroom, the role of writing to discover is stifled, the pragmatic role supercedes, and the authority of the collaboration is dictated by the task. The dissensus in the roles of writing and collaboration reflects the dissensus in the purpose for writing, which, in turn, reflects the dissensus in the ideology of the classroom. In the ideology of a teacher-centered classroom, the authority rests with the teacher and the specific demands of that teacher; in a truly collaborative classroom, the authority rests within the learning community and the evolving text.

Dissensus: Authority in the Collaborative Learning Classroom

Questions of authority and ideology pervade not only all the theoretical domains of collaborative learning, but also the pedagogical manifestations in the actual classroom setting:

> By posing an alternative to the prevailing hierarchy of generation/transmission, collaborative learning precipitates a crisis of authority. It asks students to rely on themselves, to learn on their own in the absence of faculty authority figures or their surrogates....What students can gain is the ability to reinterpret that power by defining the authority of knowledge as a relationship among people--not a hierarchal structure of generation and transmission.[53]

This "crisis of authority" is mitigated in the collaborative classroom as teacher and student adapt new roles; these new roles, however, are not easily defined. No consensus with respect to authority has been achieved as collaborative learning practices proliferate in classrooms. Since dissensus prevails as different ideologies adopt collaborative learning, the following models of collaborative learning classrooms will demonstrate some of that dissensus:

Collaborative Learning In Praxis: Two Models

THE BRUFFEE MODEL AT BROOKLYN COLLEGE

Harvey Weiner summarizes collaborative learning as practised by Kenneth Bruffee at Brooklyn College:

> ...students perform some common task in small study and discussion groups. The class is divided into clusters of three to seven students each. Each group chooses a recorder to take notes on the

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[53] Harvey Kail and John Trimbur, "The Politics of Peer Tutoring," Writing Program Administration 11 (1987): 10, 12.

conversation and, when the discussion ends, to report the group's deliberations to the whole class. The time required for a collaborative effort depends on the task, but fifteen or twenty minutes is a bare minimum. The teacher helps the class compare results, resolve differences, and understand features of the task that students did not work out on their own.[54]

The scenario described by Weiner is common to most collaborative learning classrooms, where the teacher assigns a task for small group discussion, the recorder for each group "reports out" the group consensus at the "plenary session" and the teacher uses the chalkboard to publish group results and look for common threads. This model focuses on group-generated agreement or consensus as each group defines **the** answer for that group at that particular moment. Collaborative learning based on this model is practised not only in English studies, but across disciplines and grades in the United States.

DEANZA COLLEGE MODEL

Since collaborative learning is particularly useful with non-traditional learners, community colleges with their preponderance of multi-national and multi-etnic students are turning to collaborative learning. Following is the model of collaborative learning employed in a California junior

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[54] Weiner 54.

college with 29,000 commuting students, demonstrating some of the dissensus in pedagogy of collaborative learning.

At DeAnza, where students from twelve countries in a single classroom is the norm, collaborative learning is currently employed with a block of 180 first-year students in English, speech, reading and writing classes. This methodology of collaborative learning, a variation from the Bruffee model, incorporates quizzes, a midterm and a final; a DeAnza syllabus describes their collaborative approach,

> Insofar as we are able this class will make use of the collaborative, student-centered teaching model. This puts the burden of the teaching and the learning on the individual student. It also will result in a short, objective quiz virtually every time that we have new material. Students cannot teach each other unless they come to class prepared. We will also do considerable work critiquing each other's drafts....[55]

For the purposes of collaboration, the faculty at DeAnza regards heterogeneous groups as advantageous for discourse: "The foreign students may be an advantage rather than a challenge... since they speak in different voices and have different assumptions."[56] Within this collaborative learning program, there is no agreement among faculty about

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[55] John Swensson, course outline, DeAnza College, California, Spring 1990.

[56] John Swensson, letter, 16 July 1990.

the need for consensus, as indicated by Professor John Swensson:

> Consensus is a matter of choice on the teacher's part--a point that should be made since many teachers feel threatened or stifled by collaborative learning. Since I believe we all learn more by disagreeing I consciously work to have disagreement, though not disharmony, in the classroom. I think students will naturally work toward consensus in groups so I work against that tendency by offering the opportunity for minority reports and by using "sharpshooters." The sharpshooters are a small group of students, distributed one person per work group. Their assignment is to challenge the group report, attack it, disagree with it, add to it....[57]

Accordingly, although based on concepts similar to the Bruffee model, this variation differs in its expectations of student group work--consensus is not the goal in this DeAnza model. As we shall see in detail, the ideology in which collaborative learning is practised affects--indeed, changes--the pedagogy.

Discussion of obvious dissension in praxis:

For a paradigm of learning based, as Bruffee advocates, upon achievement of consensus through conversation, the dissensus in these two models may be surprising initially. Such dissensus, however, is a natural result of collaborative learning's increasingly widespread acceptance

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[57] John Swensson, letter.

and application in education in the 1990's. Clearly, these discrepancies can be viewed as knowledge constructed in different communities--naturally, the knowledge formation (and application) in one community will differ from that formed in other knowledge forming communities. Dissensus, then is shown as a natural state of collaborative learning, despite the initial predisposition to focus on consensus. With the preceding models in mind, the following dissection of collaborative learning issues in praxis demonstrates how natural dissensus is to collaborative learning. The different ideologies in which collaborative learning is used result in many variations, often contradictory, in pedagogy. Since different ideologies elicit diverse pedagogical responses to collaborative learning, the field must recognize such dissensus as natural, even expected. As a social constructionist approach to rhetoric and knowledge, collaborative learning pedagogy must obviously reflect the different social communities in which it is practised. Dissensus in pedagogy reflects this dissensus in ideology.

Dissensus: Authority of Consensus

A major pedagogical issue causing dissensus is that of consensus. Bruffee advocates the achievement of consensus within collaborative groups, as described in his model. According to Bruffee, when assigned a task, "consensus

groups collaboratively come to a consensus."[58] Each group negotiates to create a rationale for agreement.

The previously commonly-held attitude toward consensus is highly contested in the field of collaborative learning. Both at the Bard conference and in College English, John Trimbur has spoken clearly against the Bruffee concept of collaborating for consensus. In contrast to Bruffee, John Trimbur states,

> ...we will need to rehabilitate the notion of consensus by redefining it in relation to a rhetoric of dissensus. We will need, that is, to look at collaborative learning not merely as a process of consensus-making but more important [sic] as a process of identifying differences and locating these differences in relation to each other. The consensus that we ask students to reach in the collaborative classroom will be based not so much on collective agreements as on collective explanations of how people differ, where their differences come from, and whether they can live and work together with these differences.[59]

Trimbur here associates the concept of dissensus with the authority of the group to govern its own conversation, its own knowledge, without empowering either institutional knowledge or the individual voice. Continuuing to probe the authority and validity of consensus, Trimbur comments, "I am

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[58] Bruffee, Bard Conference., 29 June, 1990.

[59] Trimbur, "Consensus" 610.

less interested in students achieving consensus (although of course this happens at times) as in their using consensus as a critical instrument to open gaps in the conversation through which differences may emerge."[60] Within these gaps and emerging differences, Trimbur places the power of making knowledge; therefore, he advocates collaboration for differences, not consensus, taking authority away from group **agreement** and resting it in student **interaction**. As evidenced in the DeAnza model, such grouping for differences is becoming more common. This dissensus within collaborative learning about consensus demonstrates an area where ideological differences of authority directly affect pedagogy; as concepts of authority change, so does the ensuing pedagogy.

Dissensus: Authority within the Classroom

Collaborative learning requires a shift in attitude, both that of the teacher and that of the student, regarding authority in the classroom. The teacher and student alike must shift the authority for learning **from** the teacher **to** the student. Accepting that language is a collaborative entity and that learning is a social construct in language empowers each student in the ensuing conversations within

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[60] Trimbur, "Consensus" 614.

the classroom; these concepts move authority from teacher to students-in-conversation.

Harvey Kail summarizes how this is accomplished, how collaborative learning gives authority for knowledge to students: "The concept of right answer is disproved by the different answers and the reasons for these different answers" as the collaborative groups report out in the plenary session; attempting to achieve consensus "uncovers differences," and these differences are validated, thus giving the authority to the students.[61] As a result, the teacher creates an opportunity for students to realize that there is "not one reality, but many realities" and then to proceed to define their own knowledge with the task and group at hand.[62]

The shift in authority from the traditional, teacher-centered classroom to the students-in-conversation-centered classroom reflects the social constuctionist ideology of collaborative learning. Acknowledging the empowerment of the students, however, raises the following pedagogical questions of authority, all to be considered in the following portion of this paper: Design of collaborative tasks; group formation; the role of teacher within the

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[61] Harvey Kail, address, Bard Conference on Collaborative Lerning, New York, 1 July 1990.

[62] Bruffee, Conference.

groups; and, evaluation and assessment. All of these pragmatic issues reflect the basic questions of ideology and authority and their differing effects upon pedagogy in the collaborative learning classroom.

Task Design

With respect to task design, much advice is given. As the starting point for collaborating, Bruffee sees the collaborative learning task as "ambiguous about methods or goals," with the purpose being "to organize the students so they can create tools they need to solve the puzzle."[63] Bruffee cautions that these tasks should not be elaborate; furthermore, Peter Hawkes advises asking questions that have more than one answer.[64] Weiner additionally advises,

> A good written statement of task will probably have a number of components: general instructions about how to collaborate in this particular activity; a copy of the text, if a single text is the focus of collaboration; and questions appropriately limited in number and scope and offered in sequence from easier to more complex, questions requiring the kind of critical thinking that leads to sustained responses from students at work in their groups.[65]

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[63] Bruffee, Conference.

[64] Peter Hawkes, "Guidelines for Preparing Collaborative Learning Worksheets," Bard College Conference for Collaborative Learning, 30 June 1990.

[65] Weiner 56.

Bruffee, Hawkes, and Weiner all assume the teacher to be the task-designer, but this assumption raises another aspect of the question of authority. In designing **good** tasks, the teacher empowers her students by challenging their interaction and discussion to a great degree. Consequently, **most** collaborative learning pedagogies readily grant the teacher the authority to set these collaborative tasks. Nevertheless, at the Bard College Conference, the concept of student-designed tasks was introduced by a minority of participants, as a way of further empowering the students with the authority for their own learning. This suggestion raised complicated issues of power, authority, and the role of the teacher in such a classroom. If better tasks further empower the collaborative groups, then student-designed tasks may actually undermine the authority of the groups. Reflecting the wide range of prevailing ideologies at the conference, no consensus to resolve these issues among teacher-advocates of collaborative learning was apparent. Judging by the dissensus of response to this question at Bard, ideological concepts and attitudes of authority again are seen to affect practice.

Group Formation

Within the classroom, even the formation of groups for collaboration engenders a question of authority. "Self-selection, random assignment, and critierion based selection

are all possible."[66] Proponents of "self-selection" (students choose their own groups) reflect an ideological stance on student authority; nevertheless, the issue is confused by findings about the efficacy of groups--sociologists have determined that homogeneity and heterogeneity affect group dynamics and the process of collaboration. Alex Gitterman, Department of Sociology at Brooklyn College, states that a homogeneous group will demonstrate quicker cohesion, but will also demonstrate less diversity of ideas.[67] By contrast, a heterogeneous group will have more initial difficulty in communicating, with issues of gender, race, or age getting in the way--yet this kind of group has a greater potential for discussion.

Sociologists Rau and Heyl confirm Gitterman's observations by reporting their success with heterogeneous groups, "We have had success with all three methods, but there is some indication that heterogeneous groups improve individual performance."[68] As a result, the question of authority here becomes clouded--again. Student selection of

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[66] William Rau and Barbara Heyl, "Humanizing the College Classroom: Collaborative Learning and Social Organization among Students," Teaching Sociology 18 (1990): 145.

[67] Alex Gitterman, address, Bard Conference on Collaborative Learning, New York, 30 June 1990.

[68] Rau and Heyl 146.

groups **seems** to empower the students more, yet criterion-based selection may **actually** empower the life of the group. The practical issue of how to select student groups for collaborative work, then, remains a source of dissension among teachers who use collaborative learning, because of the underlying questions of authority and ideology. Regarding this pedagogical issue, no agreement about group selection dominates the field.

Teacher Role

Another area of disagreement in pedagogy is the role of teacher within (or without) the collaborative groups. "Purists" feel as Weiner explains, "...the teacher's presence as a group member challenges one of the basic tenets of collaboration in the classroom....A teacher joining a group can easily undermine the development of ...[student] authority....All attention will turn to the teacher as the central figure in the learning process. Usually, collaboration advances best when groups are left pretty much to the students themselves."[69]

In agreement with Weiner, Bruffee warns that the teacher's sitting in on collaborative group discussion "makes the students anxious to use the teacher's vernacular....to find the answer that the teacher wants via

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[69] Weiner 57-58.

the means the teacher decides."[70] Thus, the most stringent advocates, like Bruffee, Weiner and the Deanza model, actually leave the classroom while group work takes place, physically removing any vestiges of teacher authority. This practice, however, is not the standard. Teacher roles during group work vary from reading and passive sitting in a removed corner, to moving from group to group, answering questions, and actual participation in discussion. Not only do these variations within the practice give different messages about the actual authority within the classroom, but this lack of agreement in pedagogy also demonstrates the range in the ideological concepts of authority guiding that pedagogy. Dissensus in pedagogy, thus, is seen as a manifestation of ideological bases and concepts of authority and, therefore, as a natural state of this learning approach.

Assessment

Another pedagogical aspect of collaborative learning that reflects both confusion regarding authority and lack of consensus is the question of evaluation and assessment. Testing implies a body of existing knowledge. Grading of papers implies fixed norms. Assessing individuals implies disavowal of the concept of collective formation of

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[70] Bruffee, Conference.

knowledge, a process that defies quantification, yet this issue is frequently ignored in publications, conferences, and practice. Weiner, in College English in 1986, states that the purpose of his article, "Is to move the practitioner of collaborative learning to an ideal model that will help students achieve knowledge in the classroom."[71] In this article, however, he nowhere mentions evaluation--few scholars in English studies do.

In practice, however, quizzes, tests, and exams are given, as evidenced in the DeAnza model. With this practice, teachers retrieve any authority they may have given their students. When Ken Bruffee was asked about "quizzing" students on a literature assignment, he suggested asking them "to write about the assigned reading for ten to fifteen minutes" rather than the teacher posing a specific set of questions.[72] Implicit in his answer is the opportunity of the student to control the testing situation, a concession which attempts to preserve student authority. Nevertheless, Bruffee's recommendation is not the common practice, as teachers of writing and literature throughout the United States relinquish and reclaim authority, moving from collaborative learning groups to individual testing and

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[71] Weiner 61.

[72] Bruffee, Personal interview.

evaluation, with the back and forth motion confusing both students and themselves. Students in collaborative groups discuss and resolve issues; their conversation is the basis and authority for their learning. When tested, a complete reversal isolates students in a confrontation with the authority of the subject matter which the teacher and institution deem as important. In many cases, a teacher must subordinate his own ideology to that of the institution in which he teaches. The dissensus with respect to assessment, then, results from contradictory ideologies.

Conclusion to Critique:

Dissensus as Consensus

That dissensus exists within the field of collaborative learning is no longer an issue. Disagreement has been demonstrated on every level of theory and pedagogy of collaborative learning in the field of rhetoric, rather than the consensus the uninitiated may have expected to find. Furthermore, such dissensus directly reflects the differences in prevailing ideologies. As the field of rhetoric changes with shifts in the invisible structures of authority and ideology, so the different approaches to rhetoric change. Collaborative learning, by its definition, must reflect the differences between varying knowledge-making communities engaged in collaborating. Therefore, the

different ideologies embracing collaborative techniques will result in dissensus in pedagogy.

Within the preceding pages, collaboration in writing is viewed within different classroom ideologies, such as student-centered, interactive classrooms, and the more traditional, teacher-centered classrooms. From this exploration of collaborative learning, focusing on collaboration and the writing classroom, implications for the teacher of rhetoric are clear. This collaboration involves real negotiation of ideas in situations in which authority has been granted to that collaboration. To the contrary, formalist teacher-centered classes, like the workplace ideology, restrict and structure collaboration, learning, and writing and thus allow for no negotiation of ideas. As a result of the observations within this paper, the wise teacher of rhetoric will rethink his or her idealogy, site of authority, the writing tasks he or she sets up for his class, and the methods he or she employs. For example, the wise teacher of rhetoric in a computer-equipped classroom should focus on the enhanced opportunities available for students to interact with one another's text, from brainstorming together through critical reading of drafts, rather than using computer software to instruct fine points of grammar or to count prepositions. By using the electronic medium for sharing ideas,

brainstorming, reading, questioning, and probing, the teacher should foster collaboration to stimulate writers to explore ideas and discover, with the voice of the emerging text more sure and clear because of that collaboration. Using computer abilities for mechanical functions, such as spellchecking, grammar programs or simply the ease of typing alone ignores the enormous possibilities for writer/reader interaction.

A rhetorician cannot, as Berlin warned, deny her own imbrication in ideology; as a result, the concommitant claims each ideology imposes upon the teaching of rhetoric will continue to cause dissensus. The authority of collaborative attempts in the classroom directly reflects those differing ideologies.

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Vita

Susan F. Henry Haytmanek

Born in Montclair, New Jersey, in 1947, Susan F. Henry graduated from Muhlenberg College in the turbulent sixties (1968), and, in the spirit of the times, after a brief stint in graduate school (M. Ed., Temple University), dedicated her life to improving the world. As a teacher in the School District of Philadelphia from 1969 to 1972, she taught in a North Philadelphia ghetto, mixing fractions with life skills--lice removal and how to use the trolley system.

After her marriage to Craig T. Haytmanek, and a subsequent move to Baltimore, Maryland, for Craig to complete his medical training, Susan continued her mission, this time working with dying children at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, combining schoolwork (to normalize their environment) with emotional and psychological support to the patients and their families.

Susan subsequently devoted ten years to raising three children, before returning to teaching, and eventually to graduate school at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in the English Department where she pursued the degree of M. A. (1991). During her graduate studies, Susan became first a Teaching Fellow, in 1987, and while a student, Assistant to the Director of Freshman English. An

Adjunct Professor from 1990 until the present, Susan is currently Coordinator of Computer Composition, planning faculty development to prepare the English Department to use computer-equipped classrooms in the new English Department facility, Drown Hall.